

News from the Wyoming Department of Health

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Vaccination Important for Whooping Cough Prevention

With pertussis (whooping cough) cases sharply on the rise this year in several states, Wyoming Department of Health officials are encouraging families to make sure their families are protected from the disease by vaccines.

California has declared a pertussis epidemic, with at least 900 reported cases and five infant deaths. Several other states are reporting increased pertussis cases. Eight pertussis cases have been reported to the Wyoming Department of Health so far this year; 20 were reported in 2009.

“While we are not seeing any unusual pertussis activity in Wyoming at this time, what is going on in other states can help remind us all about how important vaccines can be,” said Dr. Brent Sherard, Wyoming Department of Health director and state health officer. Pertussis is a vaccine-preventable disease.

“Not surprisingly, pertussis can be most severe for babies who are too young to be fully vaccinated,” Sherard said. “These babies often catch the illness from a family member or other caregiver who didn’t realize they have the disease.”

Sherard said the Tdap adolescent/adult pertussis booster vaccine is helpful for pertussis prevention and control.

“Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for people who spend time with new infants,” Sherard said. “Pregnant women or those planning on becoming pregnant should talk to their doctor about getting the Tdap vaccine. It’s also good to make sure all people around your baby are vaccinated, including siblings, grandparents, other family members and childcare staff.”

More than half of infants less than 1 year of age who become ill with pertussis must be hospitalized and it can be deadly in rare cases.

Pertussis typically begins with cold-like symptoms and perhaps a mild cough. Pertussis is often not suspected or diagnosed until a persistent cough with spasms sets in after one to two weeks. Infants and children with pertussis can cough violently and rapidly with a loud “whooping” sound.

Sherard also recommended that it is important to keep infants away from individuals who have an illness characterized by coughing.

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